

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 11-4

LOS ANGELES TIMES
24 FEBRUARY 1977

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A Solid Choice, but—

Adm. Stansfield Turner's testimony during the Senate hearings on his nomination to be director of the Central Intelligence Agency was impressive for its thoughtfulness, knowledge and commitment to conducting the business of national intelligence in strict accordance with the law.

Turner left the senators convinced that he was a solid choice for the CIA post. He left us with a similar view of his fitness.

Some of the things known earlier about Turner were underscored in his appearance before the Senate Intelligence Committee. He pretty clearly is a man of considerable intellectual accomplishment, no more likely to tolerate sloppy thinking by subordinates than he would be to tolerate it in himself. Neither, so he specifically indicated, would he accept illegal behavior on the part of underlings or dictates from his own superior—the President—that conflicted with his understanding of what the law intends.

Turner, overall, seemed to us to have the right answers to the questions about the administration of intelligence affairs that events have made it necessary to ask. On one point only did we find his response disturbing and disappointing. That was on the question of whether the CIA might use nonoffi-

cial civilians, including newsmen, in covert activities overseas.

Turner did not say yes, which would have been inconceivable, nor did he say no, which would have been preferable. Instead, he left the door open to the possibility. We think that's wrong, because we think, as we have said before, that it is wrong for any legitimate newsperson to serve as an agent of a government intelligence arm. And we think it's wrong for the government to encourage in any way the idea that legitimate newsmen might also be serving as intelligence agents.

The suspicion that some newsmen might in effect be spies does not have to be founded on fact to do great harm, inhibiting their functions as correspondents and their service to the reading public. The main responsibility for not doing intelligence work of course falls on reporters themselves. But the CIA, we think, also has a responsibility to avoid compromising American reporters overseas by leaving open doubts about their functions.

A year ago, then-CIA Director George Bush said the agency would not employ correspondents of American news organizations. Turner should have repeated that pledge. Better yet, the policy is one that President Carter should personally endorse.